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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

11. Mideast
12. Israel-U.S. Relations

Key stories in the media:

All media reported on the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), which are scheduled to take place today. Banners in Maariv and Hatzofe: "Fatah or Hamas"; Yediot: "Elections in the Shadow of the Kalashnikov"; Ha'aretz: "Hamas and Fatah in Tight Race as Voters Head to Polls"; and Hatzofe: "Hamas or Fatah." Ha'aretz quoted former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who is leading a team of international observers for the elections, as saying on Tuesday that if Hamas wants to win international recognition, it will have to become more moderate. The media reported that the Israeli security forces are in a state of high alert. Israel Radio reported that over 13,000 Palestinian police will secure the elections and that Israel has allowed them to carry weapons in Area "A" and part of Area "B," which is under Israeli security control. Ha'aretz reported that on Tuesday, the Jerusalem Municipality slapped a 500,000-shekel (around USD 108,000) fine on Hamas, Fatah, and the PFLP for hanging campaign posters in East Jerusalem in violation of city bylaws. Israel Radio reported that the police are bracing to prevent right-wing protesters from disturbing the elections in the city. The Jerusalem Post reported that 31 Palestinians imprisoned in Israel are running for PLC seats.

All media cited the speech Acting PM Ehud Olmert delivered last night at the Herzliya Conference, in which he stated that Israel will insist that the Roadmap be implemented, and urged the Palestinians not to leave their fate in the hands of the extremists. The media stressed Olmert's stated goal of borders that would ensure a Jewish majority in Israel. Media noted that Olmert did not rule out a further disengagement. Major media quoted Olmert as saying Israel supported the establishment "of a modern, democratic Palestinian state," and that he said of the Palestinians: "Their welfare is our welfare. Their well-being is our well-being." The Jerusalem Post and other media noted that Olmert tacitly acknowledged, for the first time in public, that PM Sharon would not be returning to office.

Maariv cited the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories as saying that it evacuated the Amona outpost in the West Bank last night. The newspaper reported that the purpose of the move was to petition the High Court of Justice and to prevent the demolition of the houses in Amona. The media had quoted IDF C-o-S Dan Halutz as saying Tuesday that Amona would be evacuated by the end of next week, and the Hebron wholesale market by February 15.

Ha'aretz and Hatzofe reported that on Tuesday, Knesset members from across the political spectrum accused

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz of misleading the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee over the Rafah border crossing agreement.

Ha'aretz quoted senior physicians not connected to Sharon's treatment as saying that his condition can now be defined as a "vegetative state" as opposed to a "deep coma." Yediot, Maariv, and Israel Radio note that the Likud's official web site omits any reference to Sharon. The radio cited Likud spokespeople as saying that this will be rectified in two days.

Leading media reported that Munadel Abu Aalia, a 13-year-old Palestinian boy, was killed Monday night when he was shot by IDF soldiers near the access road to his village, Al-Mughar, near Ramallah. The soldiers suspected him of laying a bomb.

Major media reported that in late December, the Shin Bet and police arrested 23-year-old Jamal Abu-Salah, a Druze who allegedly entered Lebanon and provided Hezbollah with intelligence about his village Ain el-Assad (in Israel) and IDF bases.

The Jerusalem Post quoted former U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross as saying at the Herzliya Conference that the model of unilateralism allows Israel to "shape its own future."

Yediot reported that a brochure distributed by the World Economic Forum at its Davos, Switzerland, meeting calls for a boycott of Israel. Ha'aretz New York correspondent Shlomo Shamir reported that German Chancellor Angela Merkel officially agreed on Tuesday to support an innovative World Jewish Congress program involving the establishment of an international body to work on improving relations between Western countries and the Muslim world. The initiative was developed in light of the Iran nuclear crisis and the statements made by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in which he has called for the destruction of Israel and questioned the Holocaust.

Leading media reported that John Demjanjuk, who lost his U.S. citizenship based on evidence he used to be a Nazi death camp guard, has appealed a federal judge's order that he be deported from the U.S.

Ha'aretz reported that the American biotechnology company Genzyme -- the fourth largest in the world -- is in talks over investing in two Israeli biotechnology companies.

Maariv cited a poll conducted by the Mutagim Institute among Russian immigrants, which found a 40 percent decrease (from 30 percent to 22 percent) in their support for Kadima since Sharon's hospitalization in early January. The poll found that support for the Likud and Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu rose among Russian immigrants.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "[The U.S.] approach has pluses and minuses. It prevents major failures but invites pressure to compromise on critical issues."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Even if the vote count gives Fatah ... a majority in the new parliament, Hamas will be the winner of the elections. It has already won."

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, commented in Yediot Aharonot's lead editorial: "The Palestinian voters have a tough choice, because they have to choose between bloodthirsty fanatics and corrupt moneygrubbers. [But] tomorrow a 'new Middle East' era can begin for over a million Palestinians."

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote in Ha'aretz: "The big question will be whether Israel will continue to boycott Hamas even if it joins the PA government. The likely solution will be a 'don't ask don't tell' policy."

Conservative columnist Yosef Harif wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "In light of [Abu Mazen's] behavior

so far, one can't know whether his victory would suffice to turn him into an authoritative, reliable partner for peace negotiations."

Palestinian affairs researcher Moshe Elad, a former senior IDF official in the West Bank and former head of Israel-PA coordination, wrote in Ha'aretz: "Would the U.S. have allowed such a democratic act that would have jeopardized its own security?"

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "Olmert meant every word he said. There are not going to be any more winks and promises to the Americans that, on the ground, are not kept."

Block Quotes:

I. "Let's Get Through the Winter, Then We'll See"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (January 25): "The Americans don't know who Abbas will ask to form the new government, but some officials probably nodded in agreement when their guests said it was a mistake to press for holding the elections now. They are switching from a long-term, strategic approach to a short-term, tactical, reactive one; they will wait for a coalition to be formed and then decide how to deal with its components. This approach has pluses and minuses. It prevents major failures but invites pressure to compromise on critical issues. Israeli officials have been debating whether or not the Americans will stick to their decision not to deal with a Palestinian government that includes Hamas elements, and how much they will insist that Abbas disarm Hamas in the event that he tells them it would bring down his government."

II. "Abu Mazen's Voice"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 25): "Even if the vote count gives Fatah, along with several small parties and independent candidates, a majority in the new parliament, Hamas will be the winner of the elections. It has already won. Its political wing has received legitimacy, while its military wing is preparing the next generation of Qassam rockets. What is more serious is that in the new Palestinian parliament, a cohesive and disciplined Hamas faction will contend with a disintegrated and conflicted Fatah faction. Our Likud split over 14 rebels. In Fatah, everyone is rebelling against everyone else.... If Abu Mazen wishes to live, he must shake up his party from within, to the point of a split."

III. "Palestinian Day of Judgment"

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, commented in Yediot Aharonot's lead editorial (January 25): "The Palestinians are liable to bring a tragedy upon themselves today at midnight, when the results of the elections are made public: if Hamas wins, the Palestinians are assured a continuation of their hellish life. Neither Israel nor other Arab and Western countries will applaud extremist Islam, and together they will all show the Palestinians who is the boss. If the more moderate Fatah members win, it is possible -- not certain -- that a (nearly) new and idyllic era will begin. But what can be done, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are angry at their Fatah representatives and wish to punish them. The Palestinian voters have a tough choice, because they have to choose between bloodthirsty fanatics and corrupt moneygrubbers. Tomorrow a 'new Middle East' era can begin for over a million Palestinians, who have succeeded so far, historically, in missing every chance to turn over a new leaf in the book of their lives on this strip of land."

IV. "The Outcome? We Don't Really Know"

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote in Ha'aretz (January 25): "Israel has made it clear that it is not interfering in the elections, but it is always in the picture, whether this means issuing travel permits to observers or permitting Marwan Barghouti to participate from prison. The big question will be whether Israel will continue to boycott Hamas even if it joins the PA government. The likely solution will be a 'don't ask don't tell' policy -- exactly what Israel did with the PLO during the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991."

V. "A Leader With a Question Mark"

Conservative columnist Yosef Harif wrote in popular, pluralist *Maariv* (January 25): "This week, Abu Mazen declared that he would be able to hold discussions with candidates for [Israel's] premiership Ehud Olmert and Amir Peretz. His comments can be construed as Abu Mazen's belief that those candidates may demonstrate more flexible positions than Prime Minister Sharon's. Isn't this a ridiculous statement? Sharon was the man who initiated and carried out the withdrawal from Gush Katif and northern Samaria [i.e. the northern West Bank] without getting anything in exchange from the Palestinians. Immediately after the evacuation, terrorist gangs took over the vacated land and Qassam rockets bombarded [Israeli] communities daily, while Abu Mazen and his forces stood by powerless. It appears that his declaration had only one purpose -- to depict him as a man of peace. According to the polls, Abu Mazen will win in the elections taking place today. In light of his behavior so far, one can't know whether his victory would suffice to turn him into an authoritative, reliable partner for peace negotiations."

VI. "American Duplicity"

Palestinian affairs researcher Moshe Elad, a former senior IDF official in the West Bank and former head of Israel-PA coordination, wrote in *Ha'aretz* (January 23): "The United States' aspiration to promote democracies in Arab states is understandable, but should this be done at any cost, especially at Israel's expense? Would the U.S. have allowed such a democratic act that would have jeopardized its own security?.... The U.S., which responds toughly to every expression of political subversion, wouldn't have allowed a man convicted for 25 murders, such as Marwan Barghouti, to be a candidate in elections in Detroit or Virginia. The U.S., which hunted Abu Abbas for almost 14 years until it captured him over the killing of a single American, would never have allowed his terrorist legacy to take over in San Francisco.... The U.S. apparently believes that Israel is strong enough to cope with any American whim."

VII. "I, the Leader"

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in *Yediot Aharonot* (January 25): "As opposed to Amir Peretz, who rushed to offer the Palestinians to begin final status arrangement negotiations or, alternatively, to evacuate the settlements on the West Bank unilaterally, Olmert last night placed his full support on the course of action laid out by the road map. To wit: Israel and the Palestinians will honor their commitments as specified by the road map, which will lead to the establishment of a temporary Palestinian state and further negotiations over the permanent borders. The speech last night was bad news both for Abu Mazen and the settler leadership. Olmert sent Abu Mazen a clear message: he has no intention of letting him evade his commitment to disarm the terror organizations and to execute governmental reforms as a precondition for progress in negotiations with Israel. Olmert also faced off against the settlers without stammering: he instructed the leaders of the security establishment to deal with the law-breakers in Hebron and to dismantle the illegal settlement outposts. Herein, perhaps, lies one of the differences between Sharon and his successor: Olmert meant every word he said. There are not going to be any more winks and promises to the Americans that, on the ground, are not kept. Olmert considers his first test of leadership to be his ability to impose and to enforce cabinet decisions in the West Bank."

12. Israel-U.S. Relations:

Summary:

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, commented in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist *Yediot Aharonot*: "It remains only to reach the conclusion that someone is 'looking' for Jews in the U.S. and Israel. It seems that these 'someones' include CIA and FBI officials."

Block Quotes:

"We Are All Franklin"

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, commented in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist *Yediot*

Aharonot (January 25): "For decades AIPAC members have been briefing administration officials, and for the same period, administration officials have been briefing AIPAC leaders, with not a single hair falling from their heads -- in either group. It remains only to reach the conclusion that someone is 'looking' for Jews in the U.S. and Israel. It seems that these 'someones' include CIA and FBI officials. From our perspective, as Israelis, it is a warning sign, a bright red neon light about the 'most friendly president and administration to the State of Israel.' This is a lesson, not the first, about what the Americans are capable of thinking, saying and doing, if sometime, in the future, we 'don't get the hint.' And in the meanwhile, we are all [former Pentagon analyst Larry] Franklin."

JONES